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Final Regrant Projects Completed

articles by Anne L. Foster

Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives

The Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives was founded in 1981 as a department of the Butte-Silver Bow city-county consolidated government. The Archives is housed in an historic 1900 fire house. The Archives includes an office, a work area, a spacious research room, and a variety of storage spaces. The facility is staffed by a full-time director, and two part-time research assistants. The Archives is open to the public forty hours per week, year-round.

Storage areas are located on both floors—upstairs where the fire crew's quarters were and downstairs where the fire trucks parked. The main storage area downstairs is very large and includes a section of compact shelving. Additional compact shelving is currently being installed and should meet most storage needs. The entire building is secured when not open with an alarm system. Sources for water damage are limited. The building does not, however, have a fire suppression system. Records are stored in acid-free folders and boxes and shelved on metal or sealed, wooden shelves.

The Archives is the official repository for Butte-Silver Bow government, as well as its predecessors. The Archives also houses a variety of manuscript collections, varying in size from a few items to several hundred linear feet. Significant collections include records of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, numerous labor union materials, records of fraternal and ethnic organizations, and the papers of prominent local residents. Archives Director Ellen Crain spent a significant amount of time reuniting scattered collections and gathering donation and accession documentation. The bulk of the collected materials have been processed and finding aids written. The largest unprocessed collections include records of the city and county governments.

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Treasure County '89ers

The Treasure County '89ers in Hysham was founded in 1988 as part of the statewide preparations for Montana's statehood centennial. The group acquired a 1910 brick commercial building on Hysham's main street and after extensive renovations opened the museum to the public in 1991. The Museum has provided a dedicated research and storage space for the archival materials;the Archives are housed in a small room adjacent to the exhibit area. The Museum also owns the Yucca Theater—a National Register building—across the street. The Museum is open to the public from Memorial Day through Labor Day, during special events, and by appointment.

In addition to their own archives, the '89ers house a variety of collected manuscripts and records. The Treasure County '89ers collection is unique in that the group's original purposed was to organize local celebrations of Montana's statehood centennial. Current activities range well beyond museum events to include the organization of a local all-school reunion. Manuscript collections include family memoirs and papers, the records of several rural utility companies, a small amount of government records, and local and rural school records. Significant collections include the records of the Rancher Telephone Company, the Rancher Ditch Company, the papers of A.J. Plumer, and a collection documenting the Reagin and Bolten execution in 1921—an event portrayed in the book *Montana's Last Desperados*.

During the first week of the project, Traveling Archivist Anne Foster designed a database for recording and cataloging the collections. With the help of coordinator Pat Miller and volunteer Ruth Carrington, previously-accessioned items were added to the database.

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HOW TO BASICS — The "Record Group" Concept

Do you have government records in your archives—county records, city records, school records? If so, you should become familiar with the "record group" concept.

According to *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, a record group is: A body of organizationally-related records established on the basis of provenance by an archives for control purposes. A record group constitutes the archives—or the part thereof in the custody of an archival institution—of an autonomous recordkeeping corporate body.

Are you thinking "huh"?!? Following the principle of provenance[1], the major sets of records within a public archives are the records of an agency or department of government, usually called a "record group" in the United States. The records of agencies like the Federal Aviation Administration or the Department of Defense are typical examples of records groups at the National Archives. At the state level, the Montana Department of Transportation or the Office of Public Instruction would be examples of record groups in the State Archives. If you have county records, one record group might be the Clerk and Recorder and another the County Treasurer.

The record group concept in the United States was developed by the National Archives as a response to the need to organize and control the huge bodies of records created by government agencies. At the heart of the record group is the old European *fond*, defined by Canadian archivists as the whole of the documents that an administrative body accumulates by reason of its function or of its activity.

The record group concept has not been without its critics. Continual re-organizations of administrative structures cause great difficulties for archives trying to maintain their records using definite records groups. For example, in the Montana State Archives, the series which includes city and county audit reports and annual statements has been, over the years, in the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Commerce, and now the Department of Administration. A plausible argument can be made for using any of the three as the record group. Confronted with such situations, some archivists have urged the abandonment of the record group system in favor of concentrating on arrangement by series.

Adaptation and modification of the record group concept is generally preferable to complete abandonment. For archival purposes, records should be identified, even if arbitrarily, with some creating or maintaining agency. Changes, mergers, and all kinds of administrative relationships can be represented through a variety of descriptive elements such as historical agency name lists and organizational charts, as well as traditional indexes and references within narrative descriptions.

Archival record groups can be divided into subgroups. Subgroups represent administratively discrete units or activities that produce records. For example, the Montana Department of Transportation would have subgroups for the Director's Office, the Aeronautics Division, the Engineering Division, the Maintenance Division, the Motor Carrier Services Division, and the Transportation Planning Division. In large organizations, there can be many levels of subgroups, subsubgroups, and so on reflecting the administrative structure.

Subgroups, like record groups, present the same problems of constant flux in active organizations. Such change is even more common at the office and program level of subgrouping than at the higher organizational levels. As a practical matter, subgroups should therefore be limited as much as possible to fairly stable units and functions.

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[1] The principle of provenance is that records of the same provenance must not be intermingled with those of any other provenance.

Butte *(cont.)*

The collection includes a number of special format materials: photographs, reel-to-reel recordings, and objects. Photographs are separated from manuscript collections, but remain intellectually-linked through collection titles.

The Archives has a well-designed donation form that must be signed by the donor. Collections are accessioned and a collection control folder created. Processed collections have a detailed finding aid written, which are organized by broad subject categories. Finding aids are forwarded to Montana State University—Bozeman for inclusion in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC).

Traveling Archivist Anne Foster conducted a preliminary survey of the collection to determine processing needs. Research into the organizational history of City of Butte government was undertaken to aid in record group identification. Following these efforts, an organizational plan was developed, focusing on record group and series divisions. The archivist, the research assistant, and a student intern began organizing the records and preparing the materials for microfilming. Between the size of the collections and the page-level preparation needed for microfilming, the processing was and will be time-consuming.

Crain, Foster, and the intern spent several days in the basement storage area identifying government records, sorting materials to the record group level, and determining non-permanent records that could be weeded and destroyed. The process located several records that had been separated from their record series and provided an example in large-scale processing for future projects. It also created some much-needed shelf space.

Foster concentrated on completely processing several record series to provide an example for the assistant and intern to follow. Processing included item-level examination, removing metal fasteners, a lot of flattening of documents, writing detailed descriptions, and preparing microfilming targets. Foster also outlined the finding aid, providing examples of the description needed.

Several forms were developed, including a separation sheet, a "note to the microfilmer" form, and a format for targets, in order to facilitate the filming process. Crain and Foster discussed the information found in each record series and identified microfilming priorities

Hysham *(cont.)*

It was discovered that loaned material had been accessioned along with donated material. A separate database was designed to record loaned items and the numbering system was modified to clearly indicate loaned materials. A system for recording "found in collection" items also was established. Transfer of ownership and loan forms, as well as other methods of documenting donations such as cover letters, notes, and exhibit tags, were located, compiled, and filed alphabetically by donor name.

The next step was to locate and collect the archival materials. A number of items had already been identified and collected prior to the arrival of the traveling archivist. Ellie Arguimbau, the Montana Historical Society's senior archivist, had compiled a list of archival collections during a previous visit and many of these collections had been collected and stored in the research room. Additional materials were pulled from displays and several additional small collections were located. The materials were organized into small collections, re-housed in acid-free folders and boxes, and stored in the research room. Foster wrote one finding aid to serve as an example and then worked with volunteer Ruth Carrington to take over the process. Carrington continued to write finding aids, researching biographies and histories, and describing the collections for the remainder of the project. At the conclusion of the traveling archivist's stay, approximately three-quarters of the collections had been described.

The last week of the project focused on organizing the photograph collection. A number of images were removed from display, de-framed, and added to the collection. Photographs were organized into collections, numbered and labeled, and cataloged in the database. Photocopies were made—one master copy was made from the original print and then multiple copies were made from the first-generation photocopy. This allowed multiple copies to be filed under a variety of subjects. Between the electronic catalog and the subject-oriented photocopies it should be much easier to identify needed images without undue handling of the originals. There were also many negatives and these were matched with the prints and numbered to reflect their relationship.

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News from Around Montana

Heritage Museum (Libby)

Archivist Hired. Samantha "Sami" Pierson has been hired as an archivist for the Heritage Museum in Libby for the next two years. She started on June 1 and is also serving as the museum's curator. The archivist job is due to a two-year, $175,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Pierson was hired jointly by the museum, the county library, and the public school with part of that money.

Pierson is a Certified Archivist (CA). The Oregon-raised specialist comes most recently from Colorado, where she was archivist for more than a year at the Aspen Historical Society in Aspen. The job in Libby is similar to what she did in Aspen, though she'll be working more with three-dimensional things, the artifacts, as well as written materials and photographs.

It's an easy situation for an archivist to jump into, thanks to the push by people before, said Pierson. "I'm very impressed with what the volunteers have done so far," she said. "Theyr'e in very good shape here. They've got things rolling quite nicely. It's just a matter of keep going."

"My goal is to have everything identified and labeled and in its proper place," Pierson says. "You can have the most fascinating things but if you can't find them, it's no good." The Heritage Museum has purchased the PastPerfect software to help. "All of the information we have about the collection will go into this, both the written materials and the artifacts, so that it can be searched," Pierson said. The system will be set up so the public can search. People will be able to type in a word and find a photograph and written description.

The Heritage Museum's IMLS project continues the project begun with the SHRAB regrant last fall. Jeff Gruber, museum board member, said "we're probably 10 percent done with what we hope to get done. There's still a lot of work to be done."

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